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GREEK OR LATIN FOR ADMISSION TO COLLEGE

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Many defenders of the time-honored system of requirements for admission to college, which gave first place to Latin and Greek, have seen the passing of that system with regret. But the regret has been gradually tempered by the warrant of experience, and there are few who would wish now to return to the uncompromising demands of the old education. The consensus of educated opinion recognizes the wisdom of denying disproportionate emphasis to subjects, however noble in themselves, which would take the time that of right should be devoted to subjects essential to the understanding of the needs and movements of the new age. We demand that education shall elevate and refine life; on the other hand life itself demands that this shall mean in part a practical adjustment to environment. Education and life should act reciprocally upon one another. A democratic society fosters diverse interests and looks for enlarging opportunities for all the people. The people are quick to announce their wishes; the school as a democratic institution responds with reasonable celerity. The response is, in some cases, too generous and the result is that often there is encroachment upon the supreme function of the school, which is not to cultivate in undue proportion subjects which look to livelihood, but rather to prepare for intelligent citizenship and appreciative living. The growing freedom in the public-school curriculum has been held in check somewhat by the specific demands of the colleges as to admission requirements. For the public school is also a college preparatory school, and circumstances are making it, for all practical purposes, the only preparatory school in many of the states. As such it already controls the situation. Its object as a preparatory school rightly is kept subordinate to its functions as a finishing school, for such it is for a large

majority of its patrons. Hence, it in its turn has made certain demands upon the college in regard to subjects for admission, and the college has yielded one point after another, until now there are liberal options in admission language, history, and science, together with a reasonable number of elective possibilities.

Meanwhile conditions have been at work to equalize values and distribute emphasis in college courses of study. The conditions that have contributed most to this result have had their origin from the introduction of many new subjects into the curriculum, particularly scientific and economic subjects, and the consequent rapid expansion of the elective principle. Room had to be made for the new subjects. Their values were perfectly clear, but there was no court of arbitration to decide between certain established claims and the new values; and if there had been, no satisfactory results could have been attained. Comparison of values between the old and the new subjects became odious and aroused ill-feeling in otherwise harmonious faculties. Besides, the rights of individuals and the claims of society external to the schools had a fundamental bearing on the subject and demanded recognition. Out of these conflicting claims and interests grew and prospered the elective principle. The principle is fundamental to education under the present conditions, and in some form or other, is sure to be permanent. The only doubtful question about it relates to the degree of election that may be allowed without impairing the integrity of a liberal-culture course of study.

One of the incidental results of the enlargement of the curriculum in school and college has been the gradual absorption of all the baccalaureate degrees by the one degree of Bachelor of Arts. This result is, under the conditions, inevitable, and there is a widespread acquiescence in it. At the session of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, held more than three years ago, a committee composed of Presidents Angell, Northrop, Baker, and Thwing presented a report concluded as follows: "It seems proper to let the requirements of the degree of A.B. indicate the completion of any undergraduate course, thorough and sufficiently prolonged, in a college or

university of reputable standing. Such a usage bids fair to become pretty general in this country, and, we think with good reason."

It is no part of the present purpose to discuss the movements which have resulted in the educational conditions referred to. The conditions exist. Without doubt they will continue to exist in some form or other. For these reasons they justify the question proposed in this paper, namely: If a college gives the degree of A.B. for all courses and in its admission requirements allows options and approves the elective principle, should not Greek have the same admission value as Latin?

At present Greek is at a distinct disadvantage. In the growing tendency toward freedom and elasticity in requirements and college courses, Latin has held its traditional place with remarkable consistency. There were good reasons for the persistency of Latin in the earlier period and there is cause for satisfaction in the result. For it has contributed much to definiteness and stability in secondary education in a period of experiment and transition. When modern languages became by general consent accredited as suitable subjects for secondary education, there was a tendency with which no fault can be found to displace one ancient language, in case two had been given, for a modern language. The displaced language was Greek, practically without exception. The result is that in secondary schools, of which the public high schools now constitute the largest number, Latin and a modern language comprise the language opportunity in the majority of cases. There is no essential reason why this combination should receive particular emphasis. Moreover, the languages of the preparatory period are contained in the college period, which is pedagogically reasonable, and no adequate opportunity or suggestion is presented to a student which leads him to think of a second ancient language. There are probabilities that he will take another modern language before he finishes his course. Three languages are usually sufficient as a language equipment for liberal-culture purposes in present conditions, and there is no fault to be found so far with the conditions. The fault is with the mechanical and set condition which emphasizes Latin to the neglect of Greek; or rather

practically requires Latin and excludes Greek. There is no such lack of balance between German and French; and there is no sufficient reason why it should continue to exist between Greek and Latin.

Latin has its place by virtue of inheritance, and conditions have contributed to its maintenance which no longer, in view of the present state of education, have validity. The Latin language has had a primacy in the educational systems because it was the language of the conquering Roman race. The Roman people were a world people; consequently their language became a world language. It has an integral, historical relationship to the English language. It has a highly developed grammar, and a structure of wonderful mechanical completeness. It furnishes a superb *corpus* for linguistic dissection. It has been the language of scholarship and diplomacy. There are reasons enough here stated to give it a place and hold it secure in that place for two thousand years. In the old education by the side of Greek its position was unassailable; in the new education with its free election and the Arts degree for all courses, the question is a pertinent one whether Latin is to have a perpetual title to its position of pre-eminence among college requirements, and in the secondary curriculum. If it is to be so, Greek will gradually be eliminated from the college courses of a vast majority of students. The question is not whether a student shall have Latin and Greek but, if he is to have but *one* ancient language, whether he may not freely choose between the two.

Few colleges emphasize Greek in such a way as to put it on an equality with Latin for admission purposes. Among the few is Harvard University. A few emphasize it as compared with modern languages. Johns Hopkins is a type of this class. The majority require Latin absolutely and make Greek optional without any special emphasis upon it. The situation requires that Greek be made optional with Latin on terms that will give Greek an equal chance. An immature student who "takes the course" without intelligent discrimination has a right to a suggestion regarding the value of Greek, and there are many facts in addition to the individual one to justify the suggestion. As

soon as the consideration of Latin as an admission subject is shifted from the linguistic point of view, it loses its special eminence in secondary education. Special stress on that element in education is not demanded by modern conditions; and if it were, Greek could easily meet the demand. Structurally it is an easier language than Latin. It does not have the same degree of systematized structural detail, but it does have a structure that is natural and spontaneous. The Greek order is a normal order. It expresses with utmost force and lucidity the thought of the writer. What is more important, it has a message to give of deepest significance. It has a kinship of the closest kind with the thought and literature of the modern world; and hence is not alien and ancient when considered in relation to the real demands of true culture. From Roman times to the present it has been used as a norm of literary excellence which gives it great value as a subject for linguistic study. But there is no reason for pressing this point. It has a more valid claim for consideration as a preparatory subject on other grounds which more nearly harmonize with the spirit and needs of the times.

It is for the Indo-European branch of the human family practically the original language. It is the language in which the great literary types were created and in which to this day they remain as standards of measurement. This is true for epic, lyric, and dramatic poetry and for philosophical and historical prose. An original creation is always an interesting and profitable object of study. An original creation that lays hold upon the universal has an undeniable right in the realm of education. Beginning with Homer, Greek gives universal types true for the race; it gives the unsophisticated original man as he acts in war and peace. It is less a literary document than a human document—a voyage of discovery into the realm of human life. Pedagogically there are the soundest reasons why preparatory subjects should touch upon fundamentals and get face to face with things as they really are. The Greek affords this opportunity in a unique way, both in the epic and in the other branches of literature which correspond in grade of difficulty to Caesar, Vergil, and Livy; and they are within the reach of students who aim

merely at an elementary knowledge of the language. The simplest of the Platonic writings, those first read in the schools, introduce the student to the most fundamental questions of life and duty, not merely abstractly but concretely, in relation to the man Socrates. Tragedy also deals with the essential problems and those of universal scope—those of divine and human law and destiny. Every department of the literature likely to be touched by the student deals with universal and permanent values and brings him, if the teacher is reasonably efficient, into direct contact with the vital issues of life.

More specifically the striving of the Greek for ultimate reality developed a true method of scientific and philosophical thinking. It discovered to the world and defined the social and personal virtues, and it recognized in these virtues, not opinions, the inventions of men, but expressions of eternal tendencies in the realm of law. Courage, temperance, obedience, justice, truth, service—all have a place and a justification in the Greek writings, and little has been added metaphysically to their findings from that day to this. Lotze says: "The thought of seeking out the very grounds and bases of our judgment of things and combining them constructively, in a system of truths—the foundation in fact of science—will forever remain the glory of the Greeks." From Homer to Aristotle this striving and attainment of which Lotze speaks is recorded on the Greek scrolls under different guises in the different departments. It is more than a pedagogical question—it is a public, a life question, how our abnormally active generation may be given a reasonably fair chance to come in contact with the Greek point of view.

Greek literature reveals an extraordinary grasp of the elements of our experience. This is simply another phase of the search for reality. We need to read Greek to study ourselves. The study of history is, or should be, psychological rather than a study of events. It should be primarily a study of the evolution of the controlling peoples of the world in their inner life, in their civilization rather than in their activities. The activity after all is but a token, a symbol of the real life. The Greeks compass the race—the German claims him as German, the

Englishman as English, the American as American; and he is claimed alike by imperialist and democrat. Other peoples achieved more externally than the Greeks; none has embodied in its literature so rich and varied an experience. In them therefore we study history as related to human experience. From this point of view, they mean more to the world than any other people. The rights of the individual are set forth first by the Greeks, and the outcome of the discussion was a rational set of principles relating to man as a citizen in a free society. The rights of the individual and the rights of the state, both have sane and judicial interpretation in such a way as to have direct bearing upon modern and universal theory and practice in law and government.

The characteristics which have been referred to as appearing in Greek literature all find their consummation in the central thought of Greek life. The central thought is the striving for a higher reality which is known as the ideal. The people which seeks for reality will not stop with attainable reality. They will insist on keeping in view an unattained even an unattainable ideal. This is the only genuine reality. The prevailing trend of Greek activity in politics; in literature in its various departments; in art, whether it is the art of coins, of gravestones, or its highest expression in the handiwork of the master artists, has been upward toward an ideal. This is the secret of the permanent value of the Greek contribution to the world; and this is the final and all-inclusive reason why Greek deserves a chance in modern preparatory education.

The Greek is a dominant element today in the realm of pure thinking and has a lesson to teach that is sorely needed in our common life, in the haste and selfishness and commercialism of the day. Utilitarianism is active in all movements. There must be an antidote for it in education. There must be a point of departure for emphasis of the reality of the ideal. No literature nor people affords this opportunity so positively and so consistently as the Greek. Their ideal is for the race. "Greece is not a country, a geographical expression; but a mode of feeling, a certain direction of the human spirit. To live for any time in

the companionship of the poets and thinkers of Greece ought to be a preservation against all intellectual narrowness or contracted sympathies, an escape from the confining atmosphere of sects and parties." The primary emphasis on Greek is not that it acquaints with an ancient people and an original and perfect language. It is that it has a spirit and an ideal that are alive and necessary for the present and the future. Above all things the American youth needs a genuine ideal and an elevation of soul toward it. He needs life more than the things of life. Our youth need what the Greek has to give; and the nation needs it. The recognition of this fact by those who control secondary schools will give to society that choice remnant of educated men, now in danger of being lost, who will be able to understand and interpret Greek thought in terms of modern experience. It is of the highest importance to the human race that this work shall be done.

The question may be asked whether a youth with three or four years of Greek to his credit will have an appreciation of the values referred to in this paper. Of course, not always; but even so there will be no loss to the student, for the language training will be fully comparable with that given by Latin. But such a question is not wholly relevant. The results that accrue to the student in any case are dependent upon his own capacity for work and understanding, together with the ability of the teacher to instruct. It is a question that has to do with method and detail chiefly, and so far as it implies an objection, might be urged with reference to many other subjects. The specific value of a subject is the question of primary importance in preparatory education; other questions are secondary. If the subject has anything fundamental in it, anything of universal application, it will still have much to contribute after the pupil has exhausted himself upon it. That which is beyond the immediate reach of the understanding is after all the element which determines the essential value of a subject as a means of education.

It is a common but unwarranted opinion that Greek is too strange and remote from normal conditions of youthful experi-

ence to be profitable for study as a first foreign language. The same objection might be urged against Latin. In fact the language structure of Greek is quite natural and normal from the English point of view. It has a large body of literature of the highest type suited for elementary use. It teaches, as we have seen, human nature and universal experience; sets forth ideals that men need; and introduces to the creative atmosphere of the Indo-European branch of the human family. Greek has these things to contribute without undue bestowment of toil on the part of the student—no greater certainly than a student of average ability is reasonably expected to give. In this respect Latin would have little, if any, advantage over Greek. If there is any weight in the suggestion that Greek is too difficult, it enforces the contention of the advocates of modern language that German or French should be studied before an ancient language.

There are good psychological and pedagogical grounds for offering a modern before an ancient language. French or German may be studied in a way to appeal strongly to youthful experience, and there is an attractiveness about them as living things with practical uses which Greek or Latin cannot have. It is true that "no language is dead in which anything living has been written," but the average schoolboy or girl, unless the conditions are extraordinary, is not able to comprehend at once the significance of this truth. The youthful imagination pictures an active life, one to be apprehended by the senses. That which must be translated into terms of his own interest and experience by intellectual effort does not make an immediate appeal. The ability to do this is a noble and a necessary part of education, but one of gradual attainment, and better suited to a mind with some training rather than to one struggling for the first time with the elements of a foreign language. There are those who believe that there should be a reversal of the present order, that a modern language should be chronologically first in the curriculum, to be followed by Greek or Latin, a free and workable option to be permitted between them. Traditions would withhold consent to such a readjustment, but no well-grounded pedagogical reason would stand in the way. There are, of course,

good reasons to be urged against such an arrangement, but modern educational method is evolving less under the influence of these reasons than under that of existing active influences. It is the duty of educators to study these influences with a view of directing them wisely. If the reversal of the present order were to give a free opportunity to Greek and secure for it a recognition that it cannot now have, there would be ample justification for it. There is much to be said against such a conclusion, but the question surely is worthy of some consideration.